

CLAIMS

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1. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems comprising the steps of:
- configuring an e-mail system polling process on a user machine;
- polling a plurality of e-mail systems from said user machine;
- retrieving data from said e-mail systems concerning mail intended for said user; and
- storing said data on said user machine in a format that permits the storage of data pertaining to said plurality of e-mail systems.
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2. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 1 wherein said step of configuring an e-mail system polling process includes the steps of:
- designating a plurality of e-mail system accessors; and
- designating an activation schedule for each of said plurality of e-mail system accessors.
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3. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 2 wherein said step of configuring an e-mail system polling process further includes the step of:
- for each of said plurality of e-mail system accessors, designating at least one of a plurality of parameters selected from a message retrieval group consisting essentially of downloading an image, downloading text, and downloading an attachment from an e-mail system accessed by a
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- respective e-mail system accessor.
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4. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 3 wherein said step of configuring an e-mail system polling process further includes the step of:
- designating at least one message display parameter for each of said plurality of e-mail system accessors.

5. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 1 wherein said step of polling a plurality of e-mail systems from said user machine includes the steps of:

detecting a time to initiate a poll for a given e-mail system;

5 establishing a mail connection to said e-mail system; and

providing an inquiry to said e-mail system to determine the existence of messages for said user.

10 6. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 5 wherein said step of establishing a mail mechanism includes the step of activating of an e-mail system accessor.

15 7. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 6 wherein said step of retrieving data includes the step of retrieving data from said e-mail system accessor.

Sub A2 20 8. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 5 wherein said step of storing data includes the step of storing an e-mail database structure in a machine-readable memory, where said e-mail database structure includes a plurality of mail headers and a message block for each retrieved messages, where each message block is linked to a mail header corresponding to the origin of the data stored in said message block.

9. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 1 wherein said step of polling involves the steps of:

25 initializing a modem;

dialing the telephone number of an e-mail system with said modem; and

communicating with said e-mail system over a telephone connection.

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10. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 1 further comprising the steps of:

visually displaying an indication that there is at least one message from at least one e-mail system for said user.

11. A method for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 10 further comprising visually displaying information concerning at least one message detected at an e-mail system for said user.

12. An apparatus for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems comprising:

a digital processor;

read/write memory coupled to said digital processor;

at least one external communications channel coupled to said digital processor permitting said digital processor to communicate with a plurality of external electronic mail systems;

a poller at least partially stored in said read/write memory and executable on said digital processor, said poller being operative to generate inquiries over said at least one communications channel to said plurality of electronic mail systems;

a data retriever at least partially stored in said read/write memory and executable on said digital processor, said data retriever being operative to receive data concerning mail intended for a designated user from said plurality of electronic mail systems; and

a database handler at least partially stored in said read/write memory and executable on said digital processor, said database handler being operative to store and retrieve said data concerning mail for said designated user from said plurality of electronic mail systems.

13. An apparatus for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 12 wherein said at least one external communications channel includes a Local Area Network (LAN).

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Sub A3 14. An apparatus for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 12 wherein said at least one external communications channel includes a modem and a telephone line.

5 15. An apparatus for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 12 wherein said at least one external communications channel includes a terminal emulator coupling said digital processor to computer system having a significantly more powerful digital processor.

16. An apparatus for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 12 further comprising:

10 a controller at least partially stored in said read/write memory for selectively controlling said poller, said data retriever, and said data handler.

15 17. An apparatus for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems as recited in claim 16 further comprising an inputter at least partially stored in said read/write memory to provide user inputs to said controller, and a displayer at least partially stored in said read/write memory to selectively display data stored by said data handler.

18. An article of manufacture for monitoring multiple electronic mail systems comprising:

20 a machine-readable storage medium;

a poller stored in said storage medium and including program instructions to generate inquiries over at least one communications channel to a plurality of electronic mail systems;

25 a data retriever stored in said storage medium and including program instructions to receive data concerning mail intended for a designated user from said plurality of electronic mail systems; and

a data handler stored in said storage medium and including program instructions to store and retrieve said data concerning mail for said designated user from said plurality of electronic mail systems.

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19. An article of manufacture as recited in claim 18 further comprising:  
a controller stored in said storage medium for selectively controlling said poller, said data retriever, and said data handler.

20. An article of manufacture as recited in claim 29 further comprising an inputter stored in said storage medium to provide user inputs to said controller, and a displayer coupled to said data handler and to said controller to selectively display data stored by said data handler.

21. An e-mail database structure stored in a machine-readable memory comprising:  
a plurality of mail headers corresponding to a plurality of e-mail systems that are being monitored for messages for a designated user; and

a message block corresponding to each detected message for said designated user from said plurality of e-mail systems, wherein each message block is linked with an e-mail header of said plurality of e-mail headers corresponding to the e-mail system from which it was derived.

22. An e-mail database structure as recited in claim 21 wherein each of said plurality of mail headers includes information concerning the number of messages with which it is linked.

23. An e-mail database structure as recited in claim 22 wherein each of said message blocks includes a message identification code associated with said message block and its mail header.

24. An e-mail database structure as recited in claim 23 wherein each of said message blocks includes information concerning said a message for said designated user and pointers to data reflecting a content of said message.

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